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ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that the quality of superior-subordinate communication relationships, self-esteem, clothing consciousness, impulsiveness, and intellectual interest would account for a significant portion of variance in a multiple regression equation of female subordinates' system involvement. This hypothesis was tested with data from 164 female clerical and personal secretaries who were at an educational seminar. Results of a step-wise multiple regression analysis suggested that subordinates' system involvement could be predicted by communicative relationships with superiors and to a lesser degree by clothing consciousness. Self-esteem, impulsiveness and intellectualness were considered trivial as predictors when compared with the two major perspectives. System involvement correlated significantly higher with superior-subordinate communication than any other variable. (RL)

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SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT FOR WOMEN SUBORDINATES: RELATIONS WITH COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY VARIABLES

By

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SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT FOR WOMEN SUBORDINATES:

RELATIONS WITH COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY VARIABLES

An employee's level of system involvement may be conceptualized as the degree he or she: likes working in the organization, believes the organization encourages differences of opinion, has influence on the organization's operations, is involved in organizational decision-making, and is involved in achieving the organization's goals.[1] The extent of an employee's involvement in a work system is linked to his/her psychological identification with those who manage and/or own the organization. The payoffs for an enterprise which is the benefactor of employees who possess a sense of ownership are loyalty and maximum productivity. In an extensive study by Goldhaber et al.[2] job satisfaction was predicted best by system involvement and the quality of superior-subordinate communication relationships. We may speculate that system involvement also relates to a variety of additional organizational variables, e.g., positively to productivity, job morale, and years of organizational service, and negatively to absenteeism, work related errors, and employee turn-over.

The tenor of the times justifies special attention to the female subordinate. The behavioral study of women in the work setting is particularly important to their gaining acceptance in a largely male dominated organizational world.[3] As compared to men, women generally have been characterized as more helpful, socially oriented, expressive, sensitive, warm, and self disclosing.[4] Nonverbal studies have concluded that women are especially sensitive to verbal cues, have greater eye contact (although they tend to avert their gaze under

prolonged eye contact), smile more, display more closed body positions and are less inhibited about touching other females, but are touched more by males than they touch them.[5] These nonverbal communicative patterns may be explained as sex-related interaction and as role maintenance of the macro and micropolitical structure of the society.[6]

A comparison across eleven organizations of female and male responses provide the unequivocal answer that sex differences do emerge in communication. Foremost among these is the perception of women employees that they have less influence. The profile of women employees developed in this analysis and other studies suggest that women seem to be changing or want to change in the direction of more influence, higher status and finding greater satisfaction in their work relationships.[7]

These findings served as a basis for this investigation. The present study investigated the nature of system involvement with female subordinates. Our intention was to take a number of varied perspectives in attempting to explain variance in system involvement. The first perspective was communication oriented. We speculated that system involvement would be positively related to the quality of superior-subordinate communication relationships. The superior-subordinate dyad is perhaps the most important organizational unit. When the subordinate is satisfied with the communication relationship with the superior greater job satisfaction is typically observed.[8] Job satisfaction may be viewed as at least a partial production of superior-subordinate dyadic communication. This relationship should influence system involvement. The subordinate who has a good communication relationship with his or her superior, and

thus has higher job satisfaction, should be more likely to identify with the organization, to believe he or she is able to influence the nature of the organization, and to feel he or she contributes to organizational success. If the subordinate's major link with the organization, which is his superior, is satisfying, the quality of more abstract links, such as organizational goals, should be enhanced.

The second perspective taken in attempting to explain system involvement was concerned with the subordinate's perceptions of self. Our reasoning was that the employment experience itself conveys some measure of self-esteem. If the individual has a satisfying experience in the work situation, self-esteem should be affected favorably as beliefs about self-worth and ability would be positively reinforced. We also reasoned that perceptions of self, as reflected by clothing consciousness, would predict system involvement. "Attractive packaging," as Kantor suggests, is especially related to reward for women in secretarial positions.[9] Women who are more clothing conscious should have more of a sense of upward mobility in the organization. A concern for appearance probably means the individual recognizes that advancement is influenced by appeareance,[10] and is adapting to that expectation. Such an individual, when compared to the person low in clothing consciousness, should identify more with the organization and generally feel more system involvement. Women low in clothing consciousness may reflect the attitude that they cannot favorably influence the organization's judgments of them and resign themselves to a relatively passive role in the organization, i.e., low system involvement.

The third perspective was on the relation of personality

variables to system involvement. We selected two personality variables to study, impulsiveness and intellectual interest. (Originally, we intended to include locus of control, need achievement, and need affiliation in the study, however, the low reliability for these scales calculated from the responses in the present study forced us to omit them from consideration.) We reasoned that the nature of the subordinate role would not permit whimsical behavior. Thus, we predicted impulsiveness would relate negatively to system involvement. The impulsive individual should experience frustration because of organizational expectations which discourage impulsiveness and hence less system involvement should result. We further predicted that intellectual interest would relate positiviely to system involvement. We reasoned that the individual who enjoys intellectual pursuits, discussing issues, solving problems, etc., should be more likely to be involved in his or her organization since an intellectual dimension typically is a salient feature of organizations. Organizational involvement should function as a means for satisfying the needs of the individual who is high in intellectual interest.

This thinking produced the following hypothesis: In a multiple regression equation the quality of superior-subordinate communication relationships, self-esteem, clothing consciousness, impulsiveness, and intellectual interest will account for a significant portion of variance in system involvement.

We also explored whether the variables were equally predictive of system involvement. Our thinking was that since the communication relationship between superior and subordinate is extremely important, this factor would have the strongest relationship with

system involvement. The hypothesis was: System involvement will correlate significantly higher with the quality of superior-subordinate communication relationships than any other predictor.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects in this study were 164 clerical and personal secretaries representing approximately 80 companies who attended educational seminars sponsored by the National Secretaries Association. All of the secretaries were female.[11]

Procedures

The various measures used in the study were included in a booklet which each subject completed at the beginning of the seminar. A five-point strongly agree to strongly disagree scale was used for each item. System involvement and superior-subordinate communication relations were each measured by five items developed by Goldhaber et al.[12] Impulsiveness and intellectual interest were each measured by five items from a scale by Friis and Knox.[13] Five items which loaded highly on the clothing consciousness factor in the Rosenfeld and Plax study were used to measure clothing consciousness.[14] Self-esteem was measured by five items derived from a variety of self-esteem scales.[15]

Reliabilities for the measures were calculated from the responses in the present study. Cronbach's coefficient alpha[16] was .74 for system involvement, .82 for superior-subordinate communication relations, .77 for impulsiveness, .75 for intellectual interest, .72 for clothing consciousness, and .69 for self-esteem.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis was tested by a step-wise multiple regression with system involvement as the criterion and superior-subordinate communication relations, impulsiveness, intellectual interest, clothing consciousness, and self-esteem as the predictors. The statistical power for the test was .97, assuming an effect of medium size and an alpha level of .05.[17] A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 About Here

The multiple regression equation was significant (F= 18.24, $p < .05$, df = 5/158) and accounted for 36 percent of the variance in system involvement. This supports the first research hypothesis. The beta weights for superior-subordinate communication relations and clothing consciousness were significantly different from zero (respective F's of 73.44 and 4.75, p's $< .05$). Thus, superior-subordinate communication relations was the strongest predictor of system involvement while clothing consciousness was a weaker but

significant predictor. The beta weights for self-esteem, impulsiveness, and intellectual interest did not differ significantly from zero. Therefore, the little additional criterion variance accounted for by these predictors, while statistically significant, may be considered trivial.

The correlations of four of the five predictors with system involvement were significant (see Table 1) and in the predicted direction (one-tailed tests). This represents support, from a slightly different perspective, for the reasoning which produced the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis predicted that system involvement would correlate higher with superior-subordinate communication relations than any other variable. This hypothesis also was supported. The $r = .56$ for system involvement and superior-subordinate communication relations was significantly higher than the correlations of system involvement with: clothing consciousness, $r = .20$ ($t = 4.10$, $p < .05$, $df = 161$), self-esteem, $r = .18$ ($t = 4.15$, $p < .05$, $df = 161$), impulsiveness, $r = .03$ ($t = 5.55$, $p < .05$, $df = 161$), and intellectual interest, $r = .15$ ($t = 4.67$, $p < ,05$, $df = 161$).

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the nature of system involvement with female subordinates in an attempt to determine the comparative impact of three perspectives: superior-subordinate communication relationship, subordinates' perception of self, and subordinates' personality characteristics. Results of a step-wise multiple

regression analysis suggest that subordinates' system involvement can be predicted by communicative relationships with superiors and to a lesser degree by clothing consciousness. Self-esteem, impulsiveness and intellectualness may be considered trivial as predictors when compared with the two major perspectives. In line with this, the results for the second hypothesis reveal that system involvement correlated significantly higher with superior-subordinate communication than any other variable. The results of this present study point up the predominance of the subordinate-superior communication relationship to system involvement, and consequently extend the research of Goldhaber, et al.[18]

One explanation for what happens during subordinate-superior interaction is provided by an operant conditioning paradigm to conceptualize satisfaction "as affect associated with the positive reinforcement of behavior emitted in the presence of discriminative stimuli" as Hecht proposes.[19] The transactive relationship of superior and subordinate shapes each other's behavior, and liking by selectively and symbolically stroking or striking each other. The satisfaction with one's superior (which is a matter of affect associated with positive reinforcement of discriminative stimuli present in the superior-subordinate communication) then is transferred to the organization represented by that superior.

System involvement, additionally, appears to be related to a fit of the subordinate into the organizational norms as communicated in nonverbal clothing consciousness as a secondary predictor. Thus female subordinates who are clothing conscious probably will more easily fit into roles which reward attractiveness than those

who are not. One might speculate that clothing consciousness becomes more important to those people wh· are upwardly mobile in an organization. Further investigation might explore whether the expectant mover attends more to conservative and expensive dress before actually ascending the corporate ladder. Questions also might be raised as to what degree clothing consciousness is predictive of both females and males who are not employed in a stereotypical "woman's job." Rosenthall and Plax's finding that highly clothing conscious college women are inhibited, anxious and compliant has yet to be tested in the organization setting. Clothing consciousness of business women, rather, may be simply hard-nosed, calculated accommodation to organizational norms, as one might discover, as Knapp suggests, when researchers "re-establish contact with the subject's world."[20]

Further investigation is warranted into other possible influencial elements of system involvement. We may ask, for instance, to what degree do value and interpersonal comparison theories explain system involvement.

Superiors and subordinates even with close contact are generally inaccurate in their beliefs of how their traits are perceived by the other.[21] We have yet to learn what kinds of communicative interaction of subordinate-superior confirm or disconfirm each other's sense of self-worth, and facilitate the comparisons of each other. Nor are we clear about what kinds of communication provide compelling motives for responding affirmatively to organizational norms. Finally we might ask to what degree is system involvement or disengagement related to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life and

economic-political circumstances. It is a question neglected in this study and one worthy of consideration. Organization researchers readily acknowledge the ever present interaction of the environment upon the focal system being studied, yet we may fail to check the obvious, such as the impact of good or bad times upon job satisfaction. Any job and even a mean boss may look good during bad times, and few jobs can provide self-actualizing environments during very good times. Life satisfactions, which to date have been constructed in the context of gerontological research,[22] might well be included when we consider the perspectives which predict system involvement.

TABLE 1

STEP-WISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION SUMMARY

Step	Predictor	R	r	beta
1	Superior-Subordinate Communication Relations	.56	.56*	.55*
2	Clothing Consciousness	.59	.20*	.14*
3	Self-Esteem	.59	.18*	.09
4	Impulsiveness	.60	.03	.11
5	Intellectual Interest	.60**	.15*	.07

*$p < .05$ **$F = 18.24$, $p < .05$, $df = 5/158$

Endnotes

[1]Gerald M. Goldhaber et al., "Organizational Communication: 1978," Human Communication Research, Vol. 5 (1978), p. 84.

[2]Goldhaber, pp. 76-96. Also see Bonnie McDaniel Johnson, Communication: The Process of Organizing, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1977) pp. 295-296.

[3]Margaret Hennig and Ann Jardin, The Managerial Woman, (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press, 1977) p. 72.

[4]Sidney Jourand, The Transparent Self (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand-Reinhold, 1964) and John E. Baird and Patricia H. Bradley, "Styles of Management and Communication: A Comparative Study of Men and Women," Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Minneapolis, 1978.

[5]For an excellent summary and analysis see Kathi Dieke-Stewart "Sex Differences In Non-verbal Communication: An Alternative Perspective," Paper presented at The Ohio Speech Communication Convention, Delaware, Ohio, October, 1978. Also Mark L. Knapp, et al., "Nonverbal Communication: Issues and Appraisal," Human Communication Research, Vol. 4 (Spring 1978) pp. 271-280.

[6]Nancy M. Henley, Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977) and Mary Brown Parlee, "Conversational Politics," Psychology Today, Vol. 12 (May 1979) p. 48-56.

[7]Gail A. Siegerdt, "Sex Differences in Organizational Communication: A Study Towards Sex-Based Profiles," Paper presented at the ICA Convention, Philadelphia, 1979. Also see John E. Baird, Jr. and Patricia H. Bradley, "Styles of Management and Communication: A Comparative Study of Men and Women," Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Minneapolis, November, 1978.

[8]Goldhaber, et al.

[9]Approximately 97% of all secretaries are women, and ironically that same percentage, 97% of all managers are men according to Rosabeth Moss Kanter, NBC Interview, Cleveland, June, 1979.

[10]Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

[11]Occasionally a male will belong to the National Secretaries Association, but typically all officers, members and nonmembers who come to their seminars are women.

[12]Gerald M. Goldhaber, et al., "Organizational Communication: 1978," Human Communication Research, 5 (1978), 76-96. We added one item to the four listed for system involvement. The item-total corrected correlation for this item was .52.

[13]Robert H. Friis and Alan B. Knox, "A Validity Study of Scales to Measure Need Achievement, Need Affiliation, Impulsiveness, and Intellectuality," Educational and Psychological Measurement, 32 (1972), 147-154. We revised three of the intellectual interest items in an attempt to improve the originally reported reliability (KR-20=.56).

This, together with changing the response format from a dichotomous format to a five-point strongly agree to strongly disagree format, resulted in a higher reliability in the present study (Cronbach alpha = .75). We also included scales for measuring the luck factor of locus of control, need achievement, and need affiliation. However, the reliabilities of these scales as calculated by the responses in the present study were low (Cronbach's alpha was .54 for luck, .52 for need achievement, and .44 for need affiliation). Thus, we excluded the scales from the study.

[14]Lawrence B. Rosenfeld and Timothy G. Plax, "Clothing as Communication," Journal of Communication, 27 (1977), 24-31.

[15]John P. Robinson and Phillip R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes, revised ed. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for Social Research, 1973), ch. 3. An effort was made to select items which were common to the various scales and suggested reliability. A Cronbach alpha of .69 was calculated for the responses in the present study to the five self-esteem items.

[16]Lee J. Cronbach, "Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests," Psychometrika, 16 (1951), 297-334.

[17]Jacob Cohen, Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences, revised ed. (New York: Academica Press, 1977), p. 417.

[18]Goldhaber, et al.

[19]Michael L. Hecht, "Measures of Communication Satisfaction," Human Communication Research, Vol. 4 (Summer 1978), p. 363.

[20]Knapp, et al., p. 276.

[21]Dominic A. Infante and William I. Gorden, "Superior and Subordinate Perceptions of Self and One Another: Relations, Accuracy, and Reciprocity of Liking," Western Journal of Speech Communication, Vol. 43 (Summer 1979), pp. 212-223.

[22]Hecht, p. 364. Also see "Women's New Target: Job Bias in Offices," U.S. News World Report, Vol. 86 (July 30, 1979) pp. 58-59. The 13.5 million women clerical workers, average pay is $8,580 a year--just $1,900 above the official poverty level for a family of four. Forty-two percent of the work force are women, 56 percent of adult women hold paid jobs. Women generally are undervalued and underpaid, current unionizing activity of women is gaining favor of younger women. A National Commission on Working Women survey found 41 percent of the clerical workers were bored by jobs which do not use their skills and 40 percent want to quit but cannot afford it.